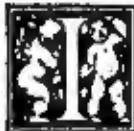


# THE NIGHT OF GLORY

By BARRY PAIN.

Our readers will no doubt remember that last month, under the heading of "My Best Story," Mr. Barry Pain, after giving his reasons for sending us "The Kindness of the Celestial," remarked: "But the story of mine which I like best personally is one that has never been printed, and has been refused by every magazine to which it has been submitted. I hasten to add that it is not immoral, and not even improper. I suppose this proves that authors know nothing about their own work."

Now, this opens up a very interesting question. Either Mr. Barry Pain or the editors are entirely in the wrong. With a view to giving our readers an opportunity of forming their own opinions we herewith publish, without note or comment, the story to which he refers, "The Night of Glory."



T was half-past six at night when she came down from the work-rooms and out into the street. She was an intensely anaemic girl, neatly dressed, thin, tired. Given better health, she would not have been unattractive; given a better way of life, she would have had better health.

A gentleman of forty-five crossed the street towards her, raised his hat, and said, "You're late to-night."

She took absolutely no notice, and slightly quickened in her pace.

"Please do not hurry," he said. "I have so much to say to you." Then she turned round on him and was very furious. If he bothered her any more she would hand him over to the police.

"Pray don't misunderstand me," said the gentleman plaintively; "I would not insult you or treat you with anything but the greatest respect on any account."

"Then what on earth do you want?" she said rather irritably.

"I will put it as briefly as I can. I happen to be very wealthy. I can enjoy nothing—the day for that has gone past for me. I wish for one night to see somebody else enjoy something. It had to be somebody who did not usually spend money freely; somebody who worked hard; somebody who had refinement and education. I thought, and I still think, that I have found all these things in you. Will you come with me? Dinner, a theatre or a music-hall, a little supper at the Carlton, and then my brougham shall drive you home. You will be rendering me the greatest possible service."

She was a girl that was quite used to taking care of herself. If she had not much confidence in him, she had great confidence in herself. She

could, at any rate, test it, and abandon the experiment when it pleased her.

"But," she said, "I have no proper dress for that kind of thing."

"You know what the proper dress would be?"

"Of course I do. It's my business."

"Very well, then, the rest is simple. You will go immediately and get all that you require in that way—dress, gloves, everything. Do not think about money, merely exercise the excellent taste which you show in your present costume. If the dress gives you the least pleasure, I know that it will give me much more. I shall be your debtor."

"It is like a fairy tale," she said.

"My brougham is here, and at your service."

The electric brougham slid noiselessly up to them. They got in.

In the brougham she watched him nervously, sideways. Yes, he was forty-five. His dark hair was grey on the temples; there was a melancholy cruelty in his thin-lipped mouth; but the greenish eyes, strong and searching, were not the eyes of one who had out-lived himself.

"I can't understand," she said. "What do you mean? You can't enjoy anything?"

"Almost that. I am, unfortunately, one who must have novelty. There are many women to whom I have given pretty toys and suppers at the Carlton. That—well, that was another affair. This is quite different. To-night I give for no other motive than to bring enjoyment to you. You see? I shall enjoy it second-hand. Tell me all about the dress."

She laughed. "Oh! you wouldn't understand if I did. I am going to Lambert's. One of the ladies there is a great friend of mine. Lucky that I am stock size, isn't it?"

"Very," said the man with enthusiasm. He had not the faintest notion what stock size meant.

When the brougham stopped at Lambert's she seemed a little troubled. "Half an hour is the least time I can possibly be," she said. "You won't like waiting."

"Like it? It will be a luxury to me. Nobody has dared to make me wait for twenty years. You shall do it. Your foot is on my neck. Seriously, I have one or two little things to do myself. In the meantime"—he handed her a roll of notes—"get everything you want and pay for it."

She was fully three-quarters of an hour away, but she was a very transfigured maiden when the commissaire opened the door of the brougham for her. Excitement, or a touch of rouge, had put a little colour into her pale face. Her dark hair was beautiful, and becomingly dressed. For the rest all was perfect from that shapely head down to the white satin shoes.

"Will this do?" she said eagerly.

"It is superb. You are transformed."

"That's quite true," she said. "I don't seem to myself to be the same kind of person. I don't think the same way. Oh! please, it didn't take nearly all that money. Look, I have got it here somewhere." She fumbled under her cloak.

"Oh! please don't bother," said her companion. "You may want it later for something or other. See what I have been doing to fill in time."

He took from its box an old ivory fan exquisitely painted, and handed it to her.

"That fan," he said, "belonged once to a princess, a daughter of George the Third. She was his favourite daughter, and it was her death which finally dethroned his reason. Take it; you also are a princess to-night."

"I cannot thank you—I cannot even begin to thank you. It is like a most heavenly dream coming true."

"Pray don't speak of thanks. It is I who am indebted to you for being pleased. I have bought another little toy for you as well."

He opened a case containing a necklace of pearls, a single row. Not of great size, but well matched and graduated.

"I am afraid," he said, "that this has no romantic history. The best I can imagine is that the diver who brought the pearls was snapped in two by a shark."

"The best?" she cried. "That is the worst! That is horrible! Oh! but what a lovely necklace!"

"Then," said the man, "he was not snapped in two by a shark. He amassed great wealth in the pearl fishery business, retired from it, married a wife, had seventeen children, and was very, very happy."

"Seventeen seems a lot," said the girl.

"To-night you have only to command. The poor man had but two. May I put the necklace on for you?"

She hesitated. After all, why be a fool? "Of course, if you like," she said.

He fastened the snap quickly and deftly. "That is the way pearls look best," he said.

She rubbed her eyes.

"Oh! don't do that," said the man.

She laughed. "I was trying to wake up," she said.

"Don't wake up. But as we now know one another so well shall we say what our names are?"

"Well, your lordship," said the girl a little timidly, "my name is Appleby—Marion Appleby."

"Not 'your lordship'; Lord Alcester, please."

Presently she had recovered from the shock of the introduction, and was eating iced Cantaloup melon. She looked pleased with the world. She tasted everything, and drank a very little champagne.

His lordship dined principally on dry toast and old brandy. He was evidently well known and appreciated in the restaurant.

"Tell me all about yourself," he said to her. "What is your ordinary day like?"

"That is what I'd like to forget just now," she said. "We live in Fulham, and it's a big family. Father's a very highly educated man and speaks three languages. He is a clerk in a very good position; but still,

you see, there are so many of us, and Mamma's health isn't good. I am up early every morning seeing to the children, and there is my own work all day, and those work-rooms are awful in the summer ; then there is the walk back, or sometimes a 'bus if I am very tired, and after that there is always something to do about the house before I go to bed."

" Any holidays ? "

" Oh ! yes. We have our fortnight at the sea every summer. Father says that is not a luxury but a necessity, and he'd save in almost any way sooner than give that up. I believe he's right, too ; you'd hardly know me after a fortnight at Margate, if the weather's been good. I get tanned, but I don't freckle. That's lucky, isn't it ? "

" It is the luckiest thing in the world. Waiter, I want a box at the *Frivolity* to-night ; see about it, please. If there is no box to be had I will not take stalls, I will go somewhere else. And, Miss Appleby, what do you suppose a day of my life is like ? "

" I haven't the least idea."

" It is far harder work than yours, and much duller. Believe me, my child, there is no toil so hard or so absolutely uninteresting as the toil that one goes through in order to enjoy one's self. In August, when I go North for the shooting, I still enjoy a little pleasure—at any rate, the life there is not too actively disgusting. But the London season—and I would far sooner die than miss any London season—is, if I may use the expression, unmitigated hell."

" I think," the girl said, " that I could be happy if I were you."

" Undoubtedly—for six months ; not always. This is really the only pleasant evening that I have spent this summer."

" What made you think of it ? Why did you choose me ? "

" An all-merciful providence, that did not desire that I should slit my throat out of sheer boredom, made me think of it. I waited, and I saw the rest of your companions pass out from the shop. Not one of them would have suited me. Frankly, they are all a little vulgar, and, which is far worse, a little uninteresting. You, on the other hand, are quite charming. You possess a fascination peculiar to yourself."

" What is it ? " the girl asked breathlessly.

" You are very good, and you have a potentiality of being very bad. If you had been very bad, with a potentiality of being very good, you would also have fascinated me. I like potentiality in others, for there is none in myself. I shall never be any better and I could not be any worse, and I don't care two straws either way. Let's talk about something more interesting than myself. What ? Oh ! the box at the *Frivolity*. Very well, shall we go, my child, or would you like to change your mind and go to something else ? "

It was quite late that night when he put her carefully into his brougham, shook hands with her, refused to hear a word of thanks, and gave the coachman the address in Fulham to which he was to take her.

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Five years had done a good deal. They had nearly, but not quite, killed Lord Alcester. This winter night, bent, wizened, wrapped in furs,

and leaning heavily on his stick, he crawled slowly along Piccadilly on his way from one club to another.

An ungloved hand touched his arm, and a hoarse woman's voice said : " Half a moment, my lord."

He gave her one quick glance from under his heavy eyebrows. Those eyes were not dead yet.

" It won't do," said Lord Alcester.

The girl laughed bitterly. " I thought you might like to look at your work," she said. " You were the ruin of me five years ago."

" My good woman," said Lord Alcester. " If I stopped in Piccadilly to talk to all the women who think I have been the ruin of them, it would stop the traffic. Let me go, please."

She still clung to his arm. " Just half a moment," she said. " The work-girl whom you gave a pretty dress to, and a string of pearls, and a fan that once belonged to a princess. You remember ? "

" Good God ! " said Lord Alcester. " Where can we talk ? "

She laughed again, the same bitter laugh, and surveyed her reflection in a shop window.

" Yes," she said, " a box at the Frivolity wouldn't do for me now, would it ? Here, I know of a place, if you'll follow me."

" All right," said Lord Alcester. " Walk slowly."

She led him by side-streets into back-streets. The little public-house was very quiet, discreet, sinful, and unsavoury. She pushed her way through to a little room behind the bar.

" Now then," she said.

With difficulty Lord Alcester dragged off his heavy fur coat and flung himself down on the crimson velveteen.

" What a godless hole this is," he said. " What are you going to have ? "

" Glass of port," she said promptly.

" You haven't taken to spirits yet ? "

" I keep that for the mornings. Shall I ring the bell ? "

He nodded. The waiter who entered looked curiously from one to another. Lord Alcester had a firm, quiet, impressive manner.

" You will bring me," he said, " a bottle of the best port you have and a small bottle of soda-water. Make up that fire."

" I never said a bottle," said the woman. " Are you going to drink the rest ? "

" I am going to drink the soda-water. Don't talk about that. Sit down by the fire. Warm your hands and tell me about yourself."

It was not until she had finished her first glass of port that she began on the subject. " There is no more to say than what I said before," she said. " You were my ruin."

" I remember that night very distinctly. I never made love to you. I never tried to kiss you. I never treated you with any less respect than I would have treated a woman of my own class. What are you talking about ? What is all this nonsense ? "

" No nonsense at all. How did you think it would be when I got

home that night with fifty pounds' worth of new clothes, and my pearl necklace, and a story of a theatre and supper afterwards? Do you think they would believe my word at home? They said they did; I have got a temper, and they daren't say anything else; but they let me see very well that they didn't believe me. I wasn't going to stand it. Next morning at breakfast, when they were all full of the thing, I gave them some straight talking, and then I cleared out."

"Am I responsible for the heat of your temper and the straightness of your talking?"

"You might have guessed how it would be with me. Did you think that after one night of glory like that I was going back to perpetual drudgery? I'd seen life as it might be, and I'd been given a bad name. I'd only got to deserve it."

"How much did you get for the pearl necklace?"

"Three hundred and fifty."

"Then you were swindled."

"I know that, of course. I told them so. What did it matter? It was all gone in a few weeks. I can tell you I made money fly in those days. That's all past. I've lost what little good looks I ever had, haven't I?"

"Quite," said Lord Alcester mercilessly. "You drink, you see," he added.

The girl put down her glass and fumbled desperately for a dirty little handkerchief with her face screwed awry. She dabbed at her eyes and shook with sobs.

"Stop that," said Lord Alcester. "You are making the devil of a row. Look here, come to business."

"I might have been good," she moaned. "If I had never met you I might have been good."

Lord Alcester was writing something on one of his visiting-cards. He stepped over to her and touched her on the shoulder. "Can you read that address?" he said.

"Yes," she said between her sobs. "Lincoln's Inn-fields. Solicitors, I suppose?"

"Quite so," said Lord Alcester, as he struggled back into his coat again. "They'll give you a pound a week as long as you live. Call for it on Saturday mornings. I could also give you plenty of good advice, but I won't. Are you coming?"

She glanced at the decanter by her side. "Not quite yet," she said. "I think I'll just—"

"Oh! I see," said Lord Alcester contemptuously. "Good-night, then."

Out in the street he stopped the first hansom that he saw. The man had often driven him before.

"What will you take," he said to the man, "to drive this cab to eternal smash? Drive it, for instance, down the Duke of York's steps?"

The cabman smiled patiently. "Which club did you say, my lord?"

Lord Alcester gave the address of his club and got into the cab.